

## Meaningful Ashes

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## Meaningful Ashes

**\*\*Author's note: First of all, Happy New Year to you. Best wishes and everything. =) \*\***

**\*\*Then, of course, my apologies for making you wait for the next chapter of\_ Beyond the Realms\_. I'm working on that, so don't worry, we will get there eventually. I just had other problems to deal with and I can tell you I have never been happier to celebrate the beginning of a new year, or rather the end of the previous one. \*\***

**\*\*Hope you enjoy this bittersweet one-shot anyway. =)\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p>The first stars were slowly appearing in the night sky.<p>

Quietly walking back to the village after a rather long training session and her Deadly Nadder trotting happily after her, Astrid was busy wondering why on Midgard did the Gods decide that Hiccup would be the one to end a centuries-long bloodthirsty war between Vikings and Dragons.

It was not like she regretted it. She never would. She was merely curious as to why Odin and His mighty peers would choose a fishbone to carry out Their sacred Will. Sometimes, even Hiccup said that the irony of it was incredible, considering how both his parents were extremely skilled dragon-killers.

Every member of the Hairy Hooligans Tribe knew the story of how Stoick had popped a dragon's head clean off its shoulders when he was only a baby. As for Valhallarama, Hiccup's now long deceased mother, she was still described as being nothing short of legendary.

Astrid thought that maybe the Gods shared Hiccup's weird sense of humor. Who knew? Maybe they even made bets over whether Hiccup would succeed in befriending a Night Fury and defeat the Green Death or not.

Picturing Odin, Thor, Loki, Hell and the others watching Hiccup and Toothless weave the bond that would save both Vikings and dragons in her mind's eye brought an amused smile to Astrid's lips. She could almost imagine Thor smirking triumphantly when Stoick's son and his Night Fury had chosen to hide within the dark, dark clouds that had foreshadowed the storming battle which took place within them. On the contrary, Loki must have been grinning lecherously when Hiccup was amputated.

Astrid frowned as this much darker thought hit her and then smiled again for if that was the case, then Hiccup probably made the Trickster God cringe in fury when he stated that his missing leg only reinforced the depth of his friendship with Toothless. Up at that point, Frigg had perhaps boasted that she had known all along what would happen. After all, she had the power of prophecy even though she never revealed what she knew.

The blonde axe-wielder's thoughts went out of her head when she realized there was still light coming from the forge. Gobber rarely worked that late except on a few special occasions but since this wasn't one of them, Hiccup was probably the reason for the fire to be still lit. Astrid paused for a moment, contemplating the choices she had; either go home and be late for dinner, something her parents "Arvarodd the Bold and Svanhilde the Honest" would not appreciate or go and see Hiccup and still be late for dinner, something her parents would still not appreciate.

Well, seeing Hiccup first seemed like the most enjoyable option.

Astrid changed directions whereas Starkad did not. The Deadly Nadder had a mind of her own and, like most dragons, was adamant about not being late for dinner. Astrid did not mind for she knew that even if he tried not to show it, her father loved Starkad and would be happy to feed the blue-scaled dragon in her place.

Inside the forge, Hiccup was nowhere to be seen at first. However, his dragon sure was. Toothless was trying to stick his head in a basket as deep as possible to reach what Astrid guessed were the last fish his rider had provided him with. Signaling her presence by walking slightly louder, she went over to where the black dragon was and waited for him to acknowledge her before she did anything else. Indeed, one of the first rules the Vikings of Berk learned the hard way while waiting for Hiccup to come back around was to not mess with a dragon while it's eating. Ever.

The Night Fury raised his head, looking at the newcomer with slit pupils that instantly grew larger in acceptance. Toothless looked

actually \_happy\_ to see her.

"Hey, big guy. Need a hand with that basket? You don't want to set the forge on fire like last time, do you?"

The purr Astrid received in response was all she needed. In one swift motion, she picked the basket up and turned it upside down to empty its content on the ground. Toothless pounced on the fish and swallowed them whole in less time than she needed to say "dragon" before nudging her gratefully, eliciting a series of low chuckles.

"You're most welcome. Now, care to tell me where your rider is?"

Toothless diligently pointed the tip of his tail at the darkest part of the forge, where the backroom his human companion sometimes spent his whole days in was.

"Thanks, Toothless."

It wasn't long before Astrid calmly opened the curtain that led to the small room and before her eyes fell on the person she wanted to see. Hiccup, however, did not react at all, too absorbed by whatever it was that he was doing, namely writing something on a piece of parchment.

She watched him for a little while, finding the way he held his charcoal pencil a bit odd but probably normal for a left-handed person. That simple observation made her think of how he was making incredible progress during their training sessions. He would become an outstanding swordfighter soon. Astrid had quickly realized that even though being left-handed could be a problem for some things, sword fighting was certainly not one of them. Hiccup had an enormous advantage there, and she was making sure "on a daily basis" that when the time came, he would use it plainly.

But for now, she was getting fed up with him not noticing her so she went behind him and snaked her arms around his shoulders, pressing her front into his back. She felt him jump in surprise and smirked as he cried out in fear and then relaxed when he saw the familiar bindings her forearms were covered with.

"By Odin, Astrid, why do you keep doing that?"

"Because it's funny." She pecked his cheek with a broad smile tugging at her lips.

"It's funny to scare the Hel out of me?"

"Oh, definitely," she insisted before looking over his shoulder inquisitively and realizing with sudden displeasure that he had taken the time to hid the parchment from her view, "What were you doing?"

"Writing a letter."

Astrid's eyes visibly darkened and he must have felt it through the way her embrace hardened. She did not like the idea of him writing a letter that he felt like she should not see. However, this was Hiccup

and Astrid now knew jumping to conclusions when dealing with him was often the wrong decision to make.

"To whom?"

He brought his right hand to take one of hers and brought it in front of his heart. She felt it beat steadily through the fabric of his tunic.

"To her."

Astrid silently gritted her teeth. What and more importantly who was he talking about? Obviously, he could not mean her because, well, there was no point in writing a letter to someone who lived only a couple of houses away from his own, not even mentioning the fact that they saw each other every day. So if she wasn't the "her" he was writing a letter to, who could it be?

Hiccup slowly turned his head to lock eyes with her. She must have looked particularly angry because the next thing her boyfriend told her was an absolutely astounding question.

"Are you actually jealous?"

She heard the very much unbelieving yet amused smile in his voice and instantly knew that in spite of everything she'd just told herself, she had jumped to conclusions. Still, that did not explain anything about who the letter was to be sent to and she certainly wouldn't give him the satisfaction of admitting that, yes, she was indeed getting jealous. However, she could not completely fake it either; he would not believe her. She chose the most elusive answer she could think of.

"Maybe."

He grinned sweetly, knowing perfectly well that the real answer was "yes" and appreciating the fact that she was only not telling the absolute truth instead of openly lying to him. She had her pride, and he would respect that.

Hiccup stood up carefully, paying attention to his balance and turned round so he could face her, taking her in his arms and eventually leaning in to place a feather light kiss on her forehead.

"I'm flattered," he told her quietly as they both just remained there, hugging one another silently.

"I still want to know who you are planning to send that letter to."

"I figured you'd say that."

"So? Who is she?"

Breaking away from their embrace, Hiccup smiled at her once more and playfully pecked her lips to let her know that there was no reason for her to fear anything.

"Give me a second to complete it and meet me at the cove. I'll explain there. I promise."

Astrid stared at him for a second, not looking especially convinced but knowing he wasn't going to change his mind anytime soon.

"Okay. But bring over something to eat because I'm starving to death."

He bent playfully in front of her. "Your wish is my order, my lady."

She rolled her eyes even though she was smiling and upon exiting the forge, she wondered for a second how it was that when Snotlout used to say the very same thing to her, she wanted to cut his tongue off and throw it into the sea.

Shrugging, Astrid headed for the cove.

When Hiccup joined her on top of Toothless, she was happy to see that he had brought enough food for the both of their rumbling stomachs. Dinner would have to wait a little more, though, because he still had some explanation to do.

Silently, he began collecting some wood to start a fire. She helped him.

When everything was in place, Toothless did not even need to be told what Hiccup wanted him to do; crouching to make things easier, the Night Fury produced a tiny blast that instantly lit a roaring bonfire. Satisfied with his work, Toothless wasted no time in lying down and enjoy the welcome heat, leaving the two humans mind their own business. He could sense Astrid was slowly but surely losing her patience.

"Are you finally going to tell me who is this damn letter for?"

"No."

"What the â€" Hiccup! You promised!"

"I promised I'd explain, and that is exactly what I am going to do. But," he added as he took the letter â€" now neatly folded and sealed with wax â€" out of his fur vest , "explaining doesn't necessarily involve words."

Astrid blinked. "What do you mean?"

"What do you think I'm going to do with this letter, Astrid?"

"Wellâ€|," she paused for a second, trying to make sense of her boyfriend's behavior, "send it, I presume?"

He shot her an appreciative grin. "Exactly."

And suddenly, without any kind of warning, he meticulously began tearing the letter to pieces. In spite of herself, Astrid reached out to stop him.

"For the Gods' sake, Hiccup, what are you doing?"

"You said it yourself; I'm sending the letter."

"You're making no sense!"

"Yes I am."

"No you're not!"

"Yes I am."

"No you're-

"Astrid. This is important for me. Just think for a moment. What do you know about this letter?"

It was the tone he used that did the trick. She knew that tone, remembered perfectly well the first time she'd heard it. It was the very same tone he had used to tell her that he would protect Toothless at any cost when she had wanted to tell Stoick about the dragons' nest. Instantly, Astrid calmed herself down again for she now knew there was a reason behind all this. She tried to think it over. What did she know about this letter? She knew that the person who was meant to read it was female and she knew that Hiccup had just destroyed the letter he was planning to send—and, according to him, he had done it so he could send it. Who would be able to read a letter that did not exist anymore?

A letter that did not exist anymore—A letter that did not \_exist\_ anymore—

Astrid's eyes widened as realization dawned on her and she felt she had trouble to breathe when a lump formed in her throat. What she was witnessing was an incredibly intimate moment for Hiccup and she suddenly felt amazingly honored that he would let her watch it. Astrid stared at her boyfriend silently, seeing his green eyes brimming with tears as he carefully let the now tiny pieces of parchment slide off his palm, then hover in the air for a little while and eventually gently fall into the flames of the bonfire. A sad and yet tender smile played on his lips as a shivering column of black, meaningful ashes slowly ascended into the skies.

Astrid reached out for Hiccup's hand, stroking it with her thumb as they both watched the remains of the letter float away peacefully.

"Your mother?" Astrid finally asked, wanting him to confirm what she believed.

He nodded. "It seemed like the best way she would get it."

She didn't know what to say. Of all the Vikings who ever lived on Berk, only Hiccup would believe in something so simple, so pure, so beautiful.

Humbled by his folly that for some reason was nothing but his wisdom, Astrid thought that maybe the Gods had never decided that Hiccup would be the one to end the centuries-long bloodthirsty war between Vikings and dragons. She simply thought that maybe, if you wanted the world you lived in to change, then you had to be the change you

wished to see in the world.

When the dancing ashes were no longer visible, Astrid found herself hoping that Valhallarama would be able to decipher them.

And when she hugged Hiccup to comfort him, Toothless once again coming closer to accomplish his duty as his human's best friend, she also hoped Valhallarama would watch over them all.

End  
file.